

2014

Je est un autre: Memory, Self, and the Autobiographic Text

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Je est un autre:
Memory, Self, and the Autobiographic Text

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Prerequisite for Honors in English

April 2014

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Introductions

I began this project hoping to understand Julia Kristeva's concept of palimpsest in relation to two texts: the *Confessions* of Thomas De Quincey, and *Les paradis artificiels* of Charles Baudelaire. Through reading criticism that has emerged in conversation with these two texts, I discovered that the palimpsest is a fruitful metaphor for many literary operations, and has a wide range of applications. In the context of these works, it is a useful figuration for understanding the autobiography, the processes of memory, and the experiences of the self as fractured into the self and a literary self. In addition, it is impossible to read these works without attempting to understand the place of intoxication in these texts, and in this project, I will also compare the varying approaches to intoxication that these writers take, and how their relationships to intoxication reflect on their constructions of the autobiographical text.

Echoing De Quincey's declaration at the beginning of his essay "The Palimpsest," collected in *Suspiria de Profundis*, I will take this opportunity to describe the actual object of the palimpsest. A definition: "palimpsest" comes from Latin "palimpsestus," which is derived from Hellenistic Greek παλίμψηστος, a compound of πάλιν ("again") and ψάω ("I scrape"). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as "[a] parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing." The *OED* refers also to the use of the word as an adjective and verb, in which the word respectively describes such an overwritten manuscript or writing surface and also the process of overwriting an earlier text.

Palimpsesting was practiced in Roman wax-coated tablets, which could be smoothed out and reused. Later palimpsests were formed on parchments prepared from animal hides. Costly to produce, but more durable than paper or papyrus, these writing surfaces were scraped by knives or chemically effaced and overwritten, growing increasingly thin with accumulating surface scrapings and recycling. Traces of old writing could often be clearly visible; a single parchment potentially contained a multitude of successive layers of text.

In the nineteenth-century, the innovation of chemical analysis of parchment palimpsests gave metaphorical weight to the object of the palimpsest. The palimpsest, in other words, became a figurative entity with reaches beyond its former status as quaint relic of another era. It gained such significance due to its metaphorical value because it had become an object that could never fully destroy its past histories; past writings could now be revealed through a chemical analysis. They could accumulate and become unified through the palimpsest; disparate though they may be from each other, chronological distinction among them was imperceptible. In a figurative sense, the palimpsest presents a vision of wholeness despite fragmentation—of the potential of literature, as Jacqueline McDonagh argues, to erase distinctions of time and place, and to "revive a lost, idealized past," a Romantic aspiration manifest in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and longed for in an increasingly industrialized society that, according to the Romantic vision of Wordsworth, held to a nostalgic vision of ownership and tradition in a regression to nature¹.

In a slight variant, in another light, one could understand the writing on the very top of the surface—the most recent writing on the palimpsest—as a text that is

1 McDonagh, 31.

inevitably "contaminated," so to speak, by the writings of the past. The project of interpreting a text becomes a matter of navigating a kind of intertextual framework. The reader here has before her a multiplicity of interpretative systems and possibilities of meanings. This vision of the palimpsest emphasizes that the essential quality of a text is that it has entire histories behind it; all text, as Kristeva formulates it, is intertext. Understanding the text according to this intertextual framework requires the reader to approach the text and to see behind it a multitude of effaced texts. The palimpsest provides a model of the text as part of a network of many other texts, disparate though they may be. Interpreting a text becomes a matter of navigating these complex webs of meaning.

Thomas De Quincey's reference to the palimpsest in his 1845 essay "The Palimpsest," collected among other pieces in *Suspiria de Profundis*, is one of the earliest notable figurative uses of the palimpsest², and in the essay he compares the paleographic object of the palimpsest to the individual consciousness as processed by the human brain. Describing the rising and falling of various empires in the course of history's passing, he insists upon the persistence of the parchment palimpsest as a kind of constant substrate throughout such vast passage in time. He describes the layers of text a single hypothetical palimpsest might collect over many centuries. A great variety of dissimilar texts from widely different cultures might collect on a single parchment. Compunctions of style and religious order might cause one to overwrite an original text

2 Preceding De Quincey's figurative use are Coleridge's "palimpsest tablet of my memory" in the poem "The Wanderings of Cain," and the classical metaphors of palimpsests used by Cicero and Catullus. However, these images refer explicitly to the waxen tablets of the classical era, rather than to the nineteenth-century innovation of chemical analysis on animal hide parchments—a slightly different figuration of the palimpsest. Thomas Reisner argues in "De Quincey's Palimpsest Reconsidered" (*Modern Language Studies*, 12.2 (1982)) that no one, however, can truly claim first figurative use of the palimpsest.

of Grecian tragedy, which would be proclaimed "heathen's tragedy" by the monks and subsequently erased and overwritten with monastic legend. The parchment might then be overwritten once more by knightly romance due to changes in taste and style invoked by history (SP 148). Despite the disparate nature of all these texts, they in fact combine into one document; one cannot view a single text without also seeing the past traces of others, as they never are fully effaced.

The mind, De Quincey writes, is but a palimpsest of the human brain where "[e]verlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen...softly as light" (SP 150). Though it seems that the impression of the newest layer has obliterated the past, past texts are in fact never fully "extinguished." Likewise, the varied events of one's life contribute to the unity of the whole, coming together and harmonizing always despite the individual, isolated nature of distinct occurrences and events in one's life. The Grecian tragedy, the monastic legend, and the knightly romance are never fully eliminated by the passage of history and repeated attempts at erasure from the parchment, even though it may seem at the time to be so fully overwritten by the new text. Such is the case with the human mind, as De Quincey wistfully writes on the passing events that imbue a life with meaning and that may haunt a person in the deep recesses of her consciousness many decades after the fact.

In this manner, he describes in *Suspiria de Profundis* the poignant realization he has at an early age that humans have the capacity for cruelty, a realization that continues to affect him into his adult life, though perhaps not as directly as it had at the time, but in ways that always shape his present moment. The incident that so affects him is when he overhears an account of how a maid had mistreated his sister in the days before she

died, perhaps contributing to her poor state. He describes how it changed the essential quality of himself, and how he would never truly forget this incident though it was a “whisper” at the time, and perhaps an exaggerated account of what had truly happened. But De Quincey writes that smaller, seemingly more insignificant incidents have more greatly affected people's lives. He describes a mother who tapped the sole of her son's foot slightly more harshly than usual, and how her son had died soon thereafter. She held the vision of her perceived cruelty for years after the fact, and on her death, it continued to affect her. Likewise, De Quincey writes of continually remembering a vision of a prostitute named Ann he had befriended during his time living on the streets of London, and how he continues to think of her in his opium-induced dreams and in reminiscence, despite the many years that have passed, and the brevity of their acquaintance. These figurations of memory form the kind of vision of a human life with which De Quincey concerns himself, and it is a vision that is essentially based in the conception of the multilayered palimpsest.

Dreams and Opium

The palimpsest challenges the primacy of linearity in a model of writing an autobiographical account of one's life, a model that resembles De Quincey's description, in the introduction to *Suspiria de Profundis*, of the faculty of dreaming as running against the strict linearity of waking life. He emphasizes the necessity of dreams and their grand potentiality—the ability to dream, in combination with the corporeal being, “forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirror of the sleeping mind” (SP 90). Alethea

Hayter emphasizes the importance of dreams in the Romantic imagination, writing that even without the conceit of opium to write about, it is likely that De Quincey would have written on the capacity to dream due to the Romantic conflation of the ability to dream and the capacity for literary creation. She writes that particular to Romantic literature is the importance of the content of dreams as an essential component of the human experience, rather than as merely a mechanistic dramatic device for the déroulement of a plot, as in the Shakespearean use of dreams as points of dramatic irony, or of atmospheric creation. Vital to being a Romantic poet was the ability to dream vividly, as dreams were key to understanding reality. Dreams paralleled the process of poetic creation and had the ability to influence the waking life, and the effect of their content was of great importance.

Dreams, most importantly, disrupt the hold of the waking life and its constraints. They are a kind of "realm of enlightenment," as Albert Béguin is quoted in Hayter, and "purify" the contents of the waking life of everyday, presenting a world where humans may be in harmony with Nature, and may be in touch with the impressions of childhood. Dreams bring purifying light from the "innermost source of essential reality"³. The Romantic conception of dreams was that it was more likely that they were the source of truth due to the nature of the dream and its structural qualities. In contrast, the waking life was paradoxically framed as illusive. Dreams were elevated to such truth-bringing levels because in addition to the purifying aspects of an essential reality that occur to the writer in dreams, the writer is forced to relinquish control over creative processes while in the liminal state between sleep and waking, allowing the writer to observe and thereby better understand her own consciousness and its ability to

3 Hayter, 70.

create. The processes of the imagination at creation prove instructive for the writer; fragments of sentences and images come together, seemingly in an unfettered way, and it is this process that is inaccessible to writers in a conscious state that fascinated them in its “freedom, eccentricity and yet concentration”⁴.

It was perhaps then natural for writers of the Romantic period to become obsessed with dreams, and for them to regard the ability to dream vividly as instrumental to the creative process. It was very common for writers of the Romantic period to keep detailed records of their dreams, and to view words that occurred to them in dreaming as the beginning stages of a creative process free from the fetters of everyday life. Writers often wrote inspired pieces from dreams: Horace Walpole, having dreamt of a hand, gigantic and armored, on the banister in an ancient castle, subsequently wrote *The Castle of Otranto*; Wordsworth dreamt of a transient Arab holding a stone and a shell and wrote of it in a passage in *The Prelude*; Keats wrote a sonnet entitled “A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode Of Paolo and Francesca” after having dreamt of the two in such a melancholy, icy storm. The necessity of the dream state led some artists to attempt at artificial means of dream attainment, if their dreamlife was unsatisfying. This state was not only attempted to be arrived at via the means of opium and psychotropic substances, but Hayter describes Ann Radcliffe's consumption of “large quantities of indigestible food, to produce dreams of terror”⁵. Tennyson believed that after six weeks of vegetarianism, consuming a meal of meat had produced a kind of “joy” in his blood, inducing most wonderful visions of sublime nature. Other stimuli used by writers hoping for rapturous visions included coffee, alcohol, and nitrous oxide.

4 Hayter, 73.

5 Hayter, 75.

Though De Quincey did not initially take opium for the purpose of invoking dream-like visions, but for medicinal purposes, he eventually grew enthralled with the drug and wrote of his life under the influence of the drug in two volumes: *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and its sequel *Suspiria de Profundis* (the “third and final stage of opium addiction”). It might be useful to consider De Quincey's account of opium consumption as the progenitor of a great variety of non-pharmaceutical accounts of drug consumption. The twentieth-century theorist and essayist Walter Benjamin, primarily concerned with the transformation of individual consciousness that opium induces, describes the phenomenon of opium's memory-invoking qualities as the inversion of Nature's usual course of allowing existence to fall through one's fingers; opium persuades Nature to throw the individual into existence. He describes a walk through Aix-en-Provence as imbued with imaginative allusion, seeing "Dante and Petrarch" in the faces of passersby, and recalling past images in the faces of others. The present moment is haunted with traces of past memories⁶. Under the influence of opium, neither future nor past exist separately; the persistence of the vision induced by the drug erases the fracturing elements of temporality and fixed place.

Opium provided De Quincey with this capacity to disrupt the bounds of waking life, and to realize the potentiality of dream—and, through this capacity, the ability to understand the linearity of waking life as inherently restraining and unrepresentative of the deep recesses of memory that the human consciousness is capable of, and may directly access, through dreams. De Quincey's opium habit became so potent because it transported him to an aesthetic realm and to a loss of agency and selfhood, providing a dream world of harmony and unity. Opium transformed activities such as going to the

⁶ Benjamin, *On Hashish*, 124.

opera into visions of ecstasy. He describes how “opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind generally, increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure” (C 106). In the same passage, the influence of opium induced, as in a dream:

a chorus, etc. of elaborate harmony, displayed before me, as in a piece of arras work, the whole of my past life---not as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music: no longer painful to dwell upon: but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction; and its passions exalted, spiritualized, and sublimed.

This is clearly, also, a vision that recalls the figuration of the palimpsest. Under the influence of opium, the past imbues itself into the present, and moments from deep recesses of one's consciousness emerge in the present, influencing the moment-at-hand in an atemporal way guided by the processes of unfettered reminiscence.

Writing as Substitution for Opium

Despite its invocations to the deepest recesses of memory and the imagination, opium inevitably provokes a disruptive kind of unity that affects De Quincey's own connection to his subjectivity and the world. De Quincey did not always feel this way. In a description earlier in the *Confessions* on his pleasures in opium, in comparison to wine, opium “on the contrary (if taken in a proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony” and “invigorates” self-possession (C 94). This type of unity is contrasted with the section that concludes *Confessions*, “The

Pains of Opium,” a fragmentary section that reflects the mental state of an opium-addicted man, interspersed with descriptions of dreams and accounts on how opium has addled his mind and affected his essential processes of cognition, producing devastating effects on his body in illness.

In *Suspiria de Profundis*, continuing from *Confessions* in a sequel that describes the final stage of opium addiction, it is the process of writing that ultimately becomes a substitution for the unification once provided by opium; it is interpretation that replaces the process of taking opium. The grand project of autobiography is ultimately to unite the fragmentary events of one's life, to understand them as necessarily capable of unification, and to view past events both in the deepest recesses of consciousness and in recent occurrence as part of the network of events that comprise the palimpsest of the mind, or the individual consciousness. The individual is left to construct a kind of coherent vision of one's life—and thereby construct her identity—with events that do not make sense with the other.

Theories of autobiography center on the same concept: that the events in one's life are subject to unification, despite the individuation of separate events that tends to occur in the unfolding of an autobiography. McDonagh writes that despite the radical incompleteness of De Quincey's project (several essays he intended for *Suspiria de Profundis* are forever lost, burned, lost beneath many piles of papers, or were never written; dreams he writes he will account for in the *Confessions* are never added to subsequent editions), and unconventional style, he makes stylistic decisions that attempt at unity in a vision of his life. This is evident in the digressive, yet rapturous essays that punctuate the otherwise linear telling of events in his childhood. These essays comprise

an attempt to unify the fragmentary; there's a kind of disruption of simply linear narration, which might otherwise impose a lack of unification among events, especially in the gap as wide as that between his self at present and his childhood. It is then that the figuration of the palimpsest in his essay "The Palimpsest" becomes a useful model for the understanding of De Quincey's project for unification. The palimpsest is an image that represents the coexistence of very disparate events—the project of an autobiography, or the project of a literary text, by extension—on the same plane of interpretation, sharing the commonality of being imprinted on one parchment, or one consciousness. In addition to the "palimpsest model" of unification, De Quincey constructs his autobiography in such a way as to incorporate the use of artifice, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

De Quincey's "impassioned prose," or what we would now call prose poetry, attempts to replace opium and reinvigorate the unity he thought he had under the influence of the drug in order to dissolve the fracturing nature of temporality and gain access to the disconnected, free-associative nature of the dreamworld. The manner of writing in these autobiographical accounts use the nonlinear model of the palimpsest—one that acknowledges the deep recesses of the past and the layering that characterizes consciousness. In the metaphor of the palimpsest, the fragmentary is united, and many elements co-exist and imbue the textuality of the present. He consciously acknowledges the limitations of narrative when he begins to describe the circumstances of his childhood, and qualifies the constraint of such description as he is about to make in his narration through acknowledging the "unnatural restraint upon the freedom of the narrative, to prevent oblique gleams reaching the reader from such circumstances....as

did really surround my childhood," gesturing towards the unnatural form of narrative to which he must sometimes resort in order to tell his story for verity's sake (SP 97).

De Quincey in fact sees a grand disconnect between his adult self and his childhood. He attempts at this unity through piecing together events such as an "incident which made a most fearful impression upon myself, deepening my tendencies to thoughtfulness and abstraction beyond what would seem credible for my years," drawing a line from the childhood incident of realizing the potential of human cruelty to his present-day cognition as an adult, and bridging the gap with narrative (SP 100). The concept of time otherwise fractures the individual, creating a gulf between these two different selves that are really essentially incompatible visions of the same person. To McDonagh, this unity is achieved by means of recognizing "the consumption of both the autobiography and the autobiographical subject as aesthetic objects" in that unity is achieved in the autobiographical subject through consuming the text and being consumed, while both remain distinct⁷. In terms of De Quincey's project in *Suspiria de Profundis*, interpreting and deciphering replace opium consumption in reviving the impressions of the past to the present in a unified way; fragmentation is unified through interpretation, both in the literary sense and in the sense of attempting to reconstruct one's life as essentially cohesive.

De Quincey's autobiographical form prefigures the modern condition of memory as described by Walter Benjamin, which is that of a "painful straining toward a psychic wholeness or unity of experience which the historical situation threatens to shatter at every turn." Visible here is the recurrent concern with temporality and its fracturing qualities. Fragmented as the modern world is, a vision of wholeness—or, as Jameson in

⁷ McDonagh, 162.

Marxism and Form puts it in his description of Benjamin's vision, "the dream of wholeness"—becomes a matter of repetition and familiarity. Familiarity in the modern sense is attained through the act of "forgetting" and then reclaiming these traces of the past in the process of reminiscence, which is recognizably a figuration, once more, of the palimpsest, carrying always the traces of the past and requiring the present to interpret itself in the framework of these webs of past events.

Distance

Autobiography as analog to the mechanism of memory

Almost as a matter of prose convention, De Quincey begins his *Confessions* by describing his project, and his hesitations in presenting such a written account to a greater audience. He seems to distance himself from the English traditions and sensibilities to which he ostensibly belongs, “revolting” as a revealing account of one's moral failings would be to an English audience, and hesitant, as he is, in publishing this account. After all, such accounts, and the stripping away of one's veneer of moral decency that results from such accounts, venture into the territory of the confessional, and in the English tradition, these “acts of gratuitous self-humiliation” come only from the very lowest echelons; that is, from prostitutes and criminals.

As the reader will take De Quincey to be both decent and self-respecting, in order to find a parallel project, he writes that it is necessary to look to other traditions, such as that of the French—a gesture, perhaps, to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his controversial, revealing, and self-consciously humiliating *Confessions*. Rousseau's *Confessions*, however, also takes part in an autobiographic tradition with the more distant forebear of St. Augustine of Hippo and his autobiographic account of the same name. St. Augustine's *Confessions* accounts for his errant youth and the depths of sin he had reached prior to his conversion to Christianity, ultimately forming itself into an account of religious experience and the salvation that Christianity provides. By invoking this tradition, albeit obliquely, De Quincey safely envelopes his writing in the tradition of other confessional works of literature written by presumed respectable people.

In the case of Rousseau's *Confessions*, De Quincey distances himself from what might have been a raw, confessional account of his misspent youth by instead inscribing himself in a tradition of revealing one's faults in order to serve the public good; of instigating social and political change by means of reflection on the self, and of attempting to truly understand the interior self by presenting a purportedly wholly and consummately truthful and revealing account. As Rousseau writes on the first page of his autobiographical confession, the overarching purpose of his *Confessions* is to form a kind of judgment on his interiority, in fully exposing to judgment his "inmost soul." And in the case of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, De Quincey indirectly inscribes himself in the tradition of monumental works in Christian morality. This is to say that yes, he was once lost, but he was saved, and may this work be a precaution to all those readers who might stray in the same direction.

After all, like St. Augustine, De Quincey proclaims that he intends to write a cautionary moral tale. Therein lies the necessity of his confessional account. Like St. Augustine, he will carefully describe his childhood, and present his descent into immorality as shameful, and as a time that had fractured the connection between his self and his conception of self. But there are more direct parallels, too. St. Augustine in Book 10 of his own *Confessions* writes on the function of memory in relation to understanding his present self, especially in comparison with the sinful person he was in the past, musing on the nature of memory, on how sensory experiences collect and gather over the years. But memory accounts for far more than simply a collection of sensory experience; it accounts for things that have not been experienced—for ideas, for dreams, and for the abstractions of numbers and ideas. It is then natural that St.

Augustine imagines with hyperbolic language the grandeur of the space and potential of memory, comparing the capacity of human memory to the great natural wonders of the world. He writes:

Great is this force of memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber! who ever sounded the bottom thereof? yet is this a power of mine, and belongs unto my nature; nor do I myself comprehend all that I am. Therefore is the mind too strait to contain itself. And where should that be, which it containeth not of itself? Is it without it, and not within? how then doth it not comprehend itself? A wonderful admiration surprises me, amazement seizes me upon this⁸.

This section on memory in St. Augustine's work recalls De Quincey's amazement at the nature of the human brain, and the account of the image of the palimpsest as a metaphor for it, an extended metaphor he expounds upon in an essay entitled "The Palimpsest of the Human Brain" in *Suspiria de Profundis*. The same exclamatory sense of wonder and astonishment as to the nature of memory is retained in De Quincey's essay:

What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished (*SP* 150).

But what might be the strongest commonality between these confessional accounts is the function of memory in terms of understanding the self in relation to the present and the continuity of one's past. The palimpsest, with its potential for infinite layers and

⁸ St. Augustine, 10.8.15.

with its ability to retain all of them, no matter how disparate, becomes an image for understanding the mechanism of memory, and its position as necessary artifice (and constructed figuration) in order to construct a whole vision of self. Memory accounts for the accumulated layers of the past in understanding who one was in the past, a self that might seem distant from the present self. After all, one's present self has just revealed all these humiliations and has renounced them in the course of a confessional narrative.⁹

As the present is constantly shifting, and as the past consists of a series of fragmented events, memory becomes the ultimate connector allowing for unification, for understanding a present self in relation to another, seemingly distant self cast away in past remembrances. This, of course, parallels the overarching project of a confessional autobiographic written work, which is that of the unification of the events of one's life in an attempt to communicate its ultimate significance with a readership, to a kind of moralizing end. This is what De Quincey's impulse to share his account of his life stems from—this desire to share his autobiographic account so that a moralizing end may be attained by the reader, having read of his experiences. In the ideation of memory as a kind of repository for all of a person's experiences throughout one's life (all the isolated events, layered in one place), autobiography is a natural analog to this constructed figuration that is memory.

In this chapter, I will examine the figuration of memory in the form of an autobiography as informed by the artifice of conscious distancing in the construction of an autobiography, which ultimately hearkens back to the ideation of memory as

9 I think, also, to Wordsworth's own autobiographic account, *The Prelude*, in understanding the mechanism of memory, and the function of an autobiography, but perhaps a much longer discussion leading away from De Quincey's work would ensue.

repository that allows for ultimate unification of fractured conceptions of self constantly at the brink of loss. Through the process of distancing, De Quincey manipulates his presented self in order to invoke the participation of the reader, putting into question the ability of an autobiography to represent a whole vision of one's life, and the ability of a writer to attain communion with one's genuine self, however that may be conceived—and to connect one's subjectivity to one's conceived “self”—through writing such an autobiography.

Autobiography as function of the distance created by artifice

Beginning *Confessions* with a description of one's project, outlining his aims and intentions, is a firm declaration of the role of artifice in the creation of an autobiography, and, by extension, of the general project of revisiting of his past insofar as it works in the same way that memory, repository that connects disparate past experiences (imagined, or truly experienced), may allow for an understanding of these past experiences in relation to the present. De Quincey delineates three main aims in his project: to expose the mechanism of addiction; to describe the “tremendous scenery which afterwards peopled the dreams of the opium-eater,” and to create interest in the “confessing subject” (C 33). As he articulates in the previous section, he promises, ultimately, to “present the reader with the *moral* of my narrative” (C 32).

Revealing the process and aims of constructing his autobiography gestures to the artifice of his project, one in which a sense of continuity emerges from both understanding the layering of fragmented experiences in the vast repository of memory, and in expressing this process in the form of autobiography. He reveals the seams of his

work, the scaffolding on which his project will be constructed, and in doing so, he creates distance between himself and the artifice that is the self he is constructing within the confines of his literary project. Alina Clej, in examining De Quincey as a precursor to literary modernism and the visions of subjectivity and self that are hallmarks of the modernist movement, writes that De Quincey continually creates a fractured, inconclusive vision of himself, ultimately resulting in a kind of “deliberate manipulation of the reader and of his own image”¹⁰. I argue that this “manipulation” is achieved through both the conscious use of “distancing” in the actual process of creating his constructed, autobiographic self in relation to his own self, and in the relationship between his constructed, autobiographic self and the readership, who ostensibly follows the fragments of his story in order to gain some kind of moral capital as a result of having read it, and who participates in the construction of his confessional project.

De Quincey identifies himself intermittently in the guise of several figures that venture towards the allegorical—primarily, the “Opium-Eater,” and the “confessing subject.” Establishing these allegorical figures in the figuration of the self creates a vision of the self that might recall the now-common practice of distancing an imagined self from one's self¹¹. Likewise, he constantly refers to the “reader” as a subject with whom he is in dialogue as he tells the tale of his life. In the palimpsest essay in *Suspiria de Profundis*, he practically ingratiates himself (though with a winking eye) to the Victorian reader, writing that, yes, of course, the “masculine reader” will already know the function of a palimpsest, and he really need not explain what it is, as the description that follows is unnecessary for this particular readership. He writes that it is

10 Clej, 21.

11 Clej refers to Rimbaud's famous statement “Je est un autre,” or the distancing of the literary self from the “real” self, as emblematic of a primary psychological motivation in modernist literature.

only for the accommodation of the work of some imagined female reader that he finds necessary this convention of explaining this obscure word that will be the subject of his discourse:

You know perhaps, masculine reader, better than I can tell you, what is a Palimpsest...But yet, for the sake of others who may not know, or may have forgotten, suffer me to explain it here...You therefore, fair reader, understand, that for your accommodation exclusively, I explain the meaning of this word.
(*SP* 150).

De Quincey emphasizes the position of the reader, crystallizing the reader as a kind of allegorical figure to whom he constantly addresses himself. He emphasizes also the reader's position in being the purpose and end of his autobiographical project in that he addresses his work to her; however, he also emphasizes the reader's position in interpreting the real purpose of the disjointed and often incomplete recollections that recur indefinitely within his work.

It is up to the reader, after all, to put together the fragments and incomplete visions that he presents in his work. It is up to the reader to understand his dream-like musings and impassioned language. Through the mechanism of placing the onus of meaning on the reader, and giving up his account to the devices of reader interpretation, he succeeds in further distancing his personal self from the self that is presented to his readership. In the mechanism of artifice that is involved in moving his presented account closer to the reader and in establishing a kind of kindred relationship between his autobiographic self and the reader (as Clej puts it, he attempts to “seduce” the reader), he distances his own, subjective self further away from these constructions.

De Quincey outlines in the chapter proceeding from his beginning invocation to the reader his project, and proceeds, almost as a matter of convention, once more, from an account of his childhood, and examines how it might have led to his present state. It is an imperfect and incomplete account of his life, as he acknowledges constantly, but it is one that will suffice in providing raw material so that—as he writes—the reader may draw some concrete connections in the events of his life that led to his present state.

His autobiography provides the necessary artifice that will eventually link the fragmented experiences he has faced in his past in relation to the present and so that the reader may understand, albeit artificially, the connection between the present and past.

Putting aside the notion of the reader's position, De Quincey also constantly refers back to the process of writing the autobiography in a motion that highlights the distance between his self and his project, between the reality of the situation and how he presents it, and in what form. Besides his opening invocation that directly addresses the reader (a process that is reprised in, among many other nineteenth-century works in French literature, Baudelaire's opening poem in *Les Fleurs du mal*, “Au Lecteur”), and the guise of humility under which he often operates, distinct phrases refer to the process of writing as tinged with artifice. While presenting his narrative, he often fills the silence between episodic recollection by resorting to such transitional phrases as “by means which I must omit for want of room” and “having dwelt so much” (C 45, 77).

All of this self-consciously structured artifice is a means by which to explore the possibility of attaining wholeness in the context of an autobiographical confessional project. As discussed earlier, the form itself, despite its artifice, is not orderly, nor does it follow a sequential narrative form, despite the purported desire to chronologically

document the experiences of his past by beginning with the circumstances of his childhood. Rather, there is an attempt to rearrange the external objects that float about his memory, to concretize and give meaning to the disparate events of his life. De Quincey's disordered narrative form—of repetition and recurrence with no particular order besides perhaps that of the oneiric—echoes Walter Benjamin's description of the modern condition and that which concerns the psychological impulses of it, which, according to Fredric Jameson, is characterized by a "painful straining toward a psychic wholeness or unity of experience which the historical situation threatens to shatter at every turn"¹².

Fragmented as the world of the twentieth century is, a vision of wholeness—or, as Jameson puts it, "the dream of wholeness"—becomes a matter of repetition and familiarity. Jameson continues to write that "the drive toward unity takes the form of an obsession with the past and with memory"¹³. Jameson writes on the modern condition in terms of the modern writer as exemplified in the figure of Walter Benjamin, who obsesses himself with finding traces of the past and in grounding himself in an idealized past. Jameson ultimately understands the modern obsession as that of understanding a kind of historicity in the recapture of memory and the repeated, familiar experiences that form a sense of past and tradition.

Jameson writes that this sense of familiarity is rooted in outward things, as there is a numbing distance between the object that occasions recollection and the internal consciousness of the self. In the modern world, this numbing is evident in everyday objects like the newspaper, which overwhelms in "jolts of novelty," protecting the self

¹² Jameson, 61.

¹³ Jameson, 62.

from that which might be overwhelming, as the modern world is marked by a sudden and overwhelming increase in the number of “jolts” to which the human subject is vulnerable. But this numbing effect also prevents the self from both truly corresponding with the external and transfiguring this communion into something that is wholly genuine to the experience. Rather, humans co-exist with the external such that they are conditioned to expect the ritual artifice of convention, which is repeated to such an extent that these conventional events are rendered “neutral and impersonal”¹⁴. For Jameson, modern writers, in their attempt to convey the “present,” resort to the repetition attendant to the everyday.

The concept of repetition in the attempt to form a wholeness of experience in the context of a self that is perceived as fractured into disparate experiences in one's past is evident in various narrative elements found in *Confessions*. The figure of Ann, the young prostitute whom he befriends in his younger days, constantly returns in the form of personal recollection and description within the course of his work, as do mysterious, Orientalizing images that hearken to figures originating from the Eastern reaches of British empire¹⁵. These figures are examined briefly, and then retreat back into the shadows of the past, but in their repetition, they are examined and expanded upon, clinging together in the project of his autobiography by means of this insistence on repetition. In the case of Proust (as described by Jameson), these repeated images were of the kind of scenes in salons he would encounter as a young man; in De Quincey, repetition is found in this constant return to his classical education (he emphasizes his

14 Jameson, 63.

15 There is much criticism, also, remarking on the modern subjectivity as formed by the Orientalism attendant to colonialism and the expansion of empire to comprise an “Other” culture, encompassing a kind of objectivity within a conception of subjectivity.

early success with Greek, as a schoolboy, and quotes classical verse throughout the *Confessions*) and lines taken from *Paradise Lost*, in chance encounters, and in visits and letters from mysterious characters.

These episodes are marked by a kind of straining for familiarity that manifests itself in repetition. To recur, it seems, is to be captured and historicized. There is the promise of wholeness and of permanence that counteracts a fear of loss. In the case of Walter Benjamin, his writing searches for familiarity in the artifice of the conventional and material world, taking these external objects and allegorizing them, conveying nostalgia for historicity. According to this mode of consciousness, modern writers can never fully succeed in presenting the facts of the present without resorting to things that are at the brink of being forgotten, but that are retrieved through reaching for a sense of familiarity.

As Barthes writes in the essay “The Death of the Author,” De Quincey can only aim for a kind of intertextual perspective with the events of his life, never truly internalizing that which he describes, but rearranging them in an outwardly way. This concept can also be taken to the level of writing and his role as a writer. All the thoughts that he expresses are through the lexicon of previous authors, as the writer can only imitate and rework that which has been written by others. Barthes refers to Baudelaire's reference in *Les Paradis artificiels* to the young De Quincey, who, with his enthusiasm for Greek, attempted to translate modern ideas into the ancient language and thereby created “a compass of diction of far greater depth and breadth than that which would have been developed by dull translations of purely literary essays”¹⁶ (PA 81). Barthes takes De Quincey's example as the predicament of the writer; yes, these “new”

¹⁶ Barthes, 53.

ideas can be expressed, but in order to express anything, the author must pull from this lexicon and imitate what has already been written, and use the language of forms that come from an intertextual network. The dictionary, after all, is simply a set of words that are defined by sets of words. This understanding of authorship and the process of writing puts into question the ability of the author to express genuine emotions, and to truly express anything of novelty.

Intoxication

It is helpful to understand these episodes of repetition and recurrence in terms of the effects of intoxication. De Quincey's writing is suffused in the sensation of loss, whether it be of past experiences, or past individuals, or past selves, and opium effects a kind of distancing insofar as it moves him further away from his self by dislocating the subject of the experience from the experience; this is, after all, the mechanism of opium intoxication. The effects of opium, in addition, mirror these literary effects of repetition and recurrence, and returns to the idea of autobiography as analog to the figuration of memory as repository that can allow the seemingly disconnected to be unified in a whole. The figuration of the opium addiction acts as a manner by which the autobiographic subject can be detached from the experience. After all, De Quincey claims on the last page of *Confessions* that not “the Opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale, and the legitimate centre on which the interest revolves.”

Joshua Wilner writes that it is opium that effects this depersonalization of the subject, isolating the subject from both time and place¹⁷. Opium's depersonalization, as emphasized by the “effacement” of De Quincey's identity in the context of an

¹⁷ Wilner (Winter 1981: 493-503).

autobiography and the references he makes to himself variously as “XYZ,” “the Opium-Eater,” and “-----,” reflects the changed self reflected in autobiography. Wilner asserts that in order to venture into the realm of self-reference, there must be a temporal divide between these two “selves,” or the self must be fractured into various conceptions of it. Distinguishing the genre of the autobiography from that of, say, a first-person fictional narrative, is the threat of “fictional dispossession,” as Wilner understands such a distinction through the lens of Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*. This manifests itself in the tension between De Quincey's asserted effacement of identity through taking on various identifying names and the fact that he nonetheless asserts this anonymity, a tension that does not necessarily exist in the context of fiction.

Paradoxically, opium promises to overcome such temporal fracturing of self. Clej writes that opium relieves memory of its duties by reducing the burden of understanding the present in terms of the past by inducing the grandeur of visions; however, this mechanism ultimately induces a form of dependency rather than of writerly freedom, of purported “simulacral empowerment over the self” that, as McDonagh might argue, is in fact disruptive to a writer's connection between self and subjectivity¹⁸. Following Augustine's paradigm of confession, the suffering and dependency resulting from intoxication creates a mindset for the “Christian tradition of introspection,” the traditional means by which the self may be reclaimed by the suffering author. But though he uses religious diction to describe his struggle with addiction, writing that he has “struggled against this fascinating enthrallment with a religious zeal,” and framing it, of course, in the context of a religious confessional, De Quincey makes clear that his struggle is not a religious one. Rather, it is the struggle

¹⁸ McDonagh 15.

against the possibility of what Cannon Schmitt calls “disintegration into some Other,” of losing the connection between one's subjectivity and one's self¹⁹.

Opium articulates the straining struggle of the autobiographic project by acting as visible metaphor, a kind of revelation of the artifice at the core of his project. Schmitt writes that De Quincey's autobiographic project parallels the effects of opium in that the purpose of an autobiography is to put forth a “unique” vision of self. This purpose is achieved through the pervasive sense in *Confessions* that this project might be unsuccessful, that absolute failure lurks around the corner, that *loss* is imminent. “Contamination” is a word often used in criticism of *Confessions* in describing the effects of opium. De Quincey structures his self as contaminated by opium; opium becomes a “literal, physical dependence” that renders in concrete terms the passive victimization in which he partakes throughout his autobiography. This victimization is visible, for instance, in the fact that he relates best to female prostitutes at the beginning of his story, and especially as he finds a kindred soul in Ann. This victimization, this “compromised self” is found again in the Orientalizing images of the Malay dreams close to the end, where opium constantly threatens to contaminate the self, resulting in loss and destitution. Charles Rzepka takes the dreamlike imagery of the Malay who comes to Dove Cottage and to whom De Quincey offers a solid block of opium, and understands it as a metaphor for the relationship between the text that De Quincey produces and the readership who takes this “gift” from the author, who is taken along for the ride that is following these confessions²⁰.

Addiction reminds the reader that though the opium may induce dreamlike

19 Schmitt, 83.

20 Rzepka, 11.

visions of attaining wholeness, the dream of wholeness that is an autobiography, loss and fracturing is always around the corner, and the form of the *Confessions* reminds us that such wholeness is illusory, and such straining for familiarity is futile.

Conclusion

Confessions demonstrates the fractured conception of self as expressed through the artifice of autobiographic writing. The relationship between the self and the constructed self in autobiography is a relationship that is articulated in the distances created between the self and the past self in the construction of an autobiography. In addition, this distancing is evident in the relationship between the readership and this artifice of “self” that is interpreted by the readership. The pseudo-relationship between the readership and the constructed self is achieved through the distancing between one's self and the constructed self. Purportedly, wholeness can be attained by autobiography, and reconstructing one's life in relation to past events, as the mechanism of memory seems to do, but this enterprise is constantly in tension as a result of the artifice of these articulated distances. Within this context, understanding addiction becomes a concretized manner by which to understand these attempts at a vision of wholeness, a metaphor for the autobiographic project, insofar as they are both imperfect attempts at wholeness.

Memory as Altered Substrate

Baudelaire, fellow opium-eater of the later nineteenth-century, reprises many of the themes De Quincey examines in *Confessions* and *Suspiria de Profundis* several decades earlier, while translating these works into French for the first time. *Les Paradis artificiels* is a two-part volume explicitly inspired by the work of De Quincey, and his project of describing the mechanism of drug intoxication. Baudelaire writes that the work on opium has already been done in such an unparalleled fashion by De Quincey that he will not add to what is already a consummate work, so he chooses to focus the first part of the volume on hashish, and devotes the second part of this volume to what is essentially a translation of De Quincey's work on opium that includes Baudelaire's interspersed commentary and reflections along the way. These parts were originally published separately in the *Revue contemporaine*, respectively under the titles of “De l'Idéal artificiel, le Haschisch,” and “Enchantements et tortures d'un mangeur d'opium.”

He begins the work writing that he would like to look at the various substances with which one may intoxicate oneself in order to try to reach some kind of “Idéal artificiels”; he concentrates on opium and hashish. The study of his work will be the immorality in consuming these drugs beyond a certain point, as well as the “jouissances morbides” and various harmful results that may befall the consumer of the drug. On account of stomach pains, he began taking laudanum, a form of medically prescribed opium. Like De Quincey, though he began taking opium for medical reasons, he would later understand the drug's capacity for inducing visions of grandeur, especially as his dosage increased when he grew tolerant to the drug's effects. In particular, Baudelaire

understood the drug as capable of inducing transcendent visions of what he calls the “ideal.” The form of the ideal as understood by Baudelaire occurs and recurs in *Les Fleurs du mal*, where the *idéal* is set in opposition to *spleen*. The poet attempts to ease the ennui and overall sense of melancholy that comes with the anguish of existence by opposing it with the ideal, which is often figured in this work in the form of an idealized love, accounting for the recurrent image in *Les fleurs du mal* of the mysterious, transient figure of a woman.

Baudelaire gestures toward this idealization in the preface to *Les Paradis artificiels*, writing that “La femme est fatalement suggestive,” that she not only lives her own life, but “vit spirituellement dans les imaginations qu'elle hante et qu'elle féconde,” being, as she is, the source of both shadow and light in innumerable dreams. In light of the transient nature of all things in the physical world, Baudelaire recalls that “la vraie réalité n'est que dans les rêves.” This is a somewhat cryptic statement that perhaps can be read in light of Genette's conception of what the “only authentic reality” is in the essay “Proust palimpseste.” He writes that “the only authentic reality, as we know, is that which is given in the experience of reminiscence and perpetuated in the exercise of metaphor—the presence of one sensation in another, the “mirroring” of memory, analogical and differential depth, the ambiguous transparency of the text, the palimpsest of writing”²¹. What comprises this “authentic reality” in Genette's figuration of it is a kind of reality that is formed in the process of reminiscence; he understands reality in terms of a past grounded in the work of metaphor, inherently multilayered like a palimpsest. This is to say that “la vraie réalité” does not exist as its own in the physical world, which is constantly shifting and cannot be held onto as a result; rather, “reality”

21 Genette, 226.

can only be expressed in the language of reminiscence, not unlike the landscape of the dream that Baudelaire claims is the only place where this true reality might be found.

Memory

Understanding the concept of memory as a cultural preoccupation of what he, and many other historians, call the “long nineteenth-century,” or the period directly proceeding from the French Revolution and ending with the First World War, Richard Terdiman presents a vision of understanding the past in which memory is the “agent” of constructing the past. The past, being constantly constructed, is then as contingent as any “cultural fact,” despite the fact that what is constructed as the past forms a grounding framework for understanding the self and existence²². In this conception of memory, memory is a tool that necessarily enables reworking and reconstructing this contingent conception of the past²³.

It seems that in contrast to De Quincey's understanding of the straining for wholeness in the conception of the past as comprising repetition and recurrence—an understanding that is contained within the ideation of memory as repository, and artifice (of distance, of autobiographic creation) as a straining for wholeness—, Baudelaire writes that the very conception of the past is subject to various forces, altered through the process of writing, revealing an understanding of the past as a contingent construction dependent on the destructive and reconstructive processes of consciousness

²² Terdiman, 7.

²³ Terdiman writes that in contrast, pre-nineteenth-century society was characterized by a marked transparency in terms of people's pasts and their relation to it; it was less of a preoccupation, and more of a given in terms of communal familiarity in behavior and tradition. What distinguishes this period of late-nineteenth-century society, disrupted by revolution, is what he later calls the “reflex” of nostalgia that occurs after periods of rapid change incited by revolutionary fervor. The question of what constitutes the past subsequently became a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century society.

and memory. The process of memory, formerly ideated as supposedly the truest repository of experience, is ultimately constantly altering the conception of the past by the process of conceiving of it. This process is mirrored in the form of writing, which is the concrete form of the conscious act of recollecting. But despite the contingency of any construction of the past by means of memory, the “past” remains the line by which an understanding of the self can be drawn, perhaps because it seems to be the only manner by which an understanding of self (especially in relation to “past” selves, as discussed in the previous chapter) can be intuited and grasped.

Baudelaire articulates this idea of understanding the self in relation to the city, which is a conceit for conceptualizing the modern self. The Baudelairean vision of the ideal as described in *Tableaux parisiens* is useful in understanding the logic of Baudelaire's articulation of the idealized past in relation to the self and the present state of modernity that surrounds the self. In the work of Baudelaire, “la vraie réalité” refers to a wholeness of vision that is only found in dreams, one that is communicated by means of creating the figure of the ideal. Instead of the conceit of distancing in hopes of wholeness, the artifice that is created is consciously separate from the bounds of the everyday. As in Haussmann's Paris, the past has literally been effaced by the imposition of a new ideal—that of empire, of an idealized past that Napoleon's nephew (Napoleon III) desired to impose in the image of the grandeur of his uncle's empire, which was, and is, much revered in the French consciousness. In the case of Haussmann's grand vision representing Napoleon III's desire to impose empire, the medieval streets of Paris were erased in favor of grand boulevards and rectilinear formations, in favor of gardens inspired by those of London, and streets inspired by the grand Rue de Rivoli paved

during the reign of Napoleon I. The streets, formerly choleric and otherwise infested with disease and revolutionary insurrection (as during the Commune, for instance), would now be replaced with sanitary, modern, paved, wide streets in which it would be difficult to instigate rebellions, but in which military movement could be easily facilitated.

Baudelaire writes of this imposition of empire in the *Tableaux parisiens* section of *Les fleurs du mal*, most notably in “Le Cygne,” where he describes the Paris that *was*. Change induces the nostalgic impulse, as Terdiman claims, and “Le Cygne” is suffused with such nostalgia. Though it was obvious that the Paris of the nineteenth-century needed to be modernized on account of the diseased, tenebrous, and suffocating streets that characterized the medieval center of the city (in addition to the cholera epidemics that took 18,400 inhabitants in 1832 and 19,000 from 1848-1849 that might have been prevented with a more modern system of sanitation and a modern city plan²⁴), Baudelaire subscribes to a romanticized version of Paris past that perhaps never existed, but is nevertheless constructed by the mechanism of memory. He writes of a swan that thinks of his “beau lac natal,” a swan that does not understand its position in this new, modern world, and that flaps its wings pathetically on dry pavement. The swan acts as a metaphor, of course, for the misplaced poet in a city that has suddenly and inexplicably changed—in a city that has been shocked into modernity, producing the inevitable “reflex” of nostalgia.

The past, after all, remains the framework by which the present self is understood, even though the past is constructed, and is contingent as a result. Reaching

24 Michel Carmona. *Haussmann: His Life and Times, and the Making of Modern Paris*, 139.

for a past, constructed as it may be, is a natural reflex to nostalgia. Baudelaire critiques this new vision of Paris because it is a pale imitation of true empire, a burlesque of the true empire of the eminent Napoleon I. In “Le Cygne,” Baudelaire writes on the mythological garden constructed for Andromache in the *Aeneid*. Andromache, wife of the fallen Hector, mourns the loss of her native Troy, having been made a concubine of Pyrrhus in the aftermath of the war. She later goes on to marry Helenus, the brother of Hector, who had been made a slave, and he constructs a imitative version of the gardens in Troy to compensate for her sad nostalgia. Jean-Christophe Cavallin writes, “In the example of Helenus producing *ex nihilo* a simulacrum of Troy, Napoleon III effaces the 'bric-à-brac' of 'vieux Paris' and substitutes the idea of a city”²⁵. In the same way that Helenus constructed a garden for Andromache in the manner of an imposed ideal on a physical reality, Napoleon III attempted to impose the ideal of a city on the old medieval Paris, and thereby created an unideal vision of a city that cannot compare with the “ideal form” of city (in the Platonic sense). The ideal imposed on the physical world results in an imperfect form, being, as it is, ineluctably rooted in the physical world.

To the extent that the gardens and streets under the vision of empire that Napoleon III desired to impose were an illusory and essentially derivative enterprise, the attempt to idealize the past is also a way of imposing the ideal, restructuring the past and understanding one's own self in relation to this contingent, constructed past. It is the poet, according to Cavallin, who contemplates the ideal, and who can see this malformed attempt at the ideal for what it is, being, as poets are, the intermediary between the ideal and the physical worlds. But in what position does the poet see

25 Jean-Christophe Cavallin, “Baudelaire et l'homme d'Ovide.” *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 58 (2006): 341-357. my translation.

herself in the midst of the unideal world and the ideal of which she conceives? And what would be the place, or necessity, of instilling such an ideal in the physical world, if it will be malformed and unideal as a general rule regarding the attempt to impose the form of the ideal on an imperfect physical world?

The act of recollection alters the essential substrate of that which it acts upon. As Jameson quotes Walter Benjamin's conception of the memory process:

Consciousness appears in the system of perception in place of the memory traces...consciousness and the leaving behind of a memory trace are within the same system mutually incompatible.²⁶

The process of recollection changes the thing that is being recollected by ordering it and organizing it into a newly arranged form. Not only does this recall Walter Benjamin's earlier quoted statement, but Jameson writes in *Marxism and Form* that the act of recollection destroys whatever was preserved by memory by *replacing* it.

In the artificial paradisaical world of the drug-induced dream, the burden of constructing wholeness seems to be lifted; the vision of an idealized world is created by means of artificial inducements. But Baudelaire argues that the true poet does not need such artifice; the very process of recollection provides the necessary artifice in order for the poet to conceptualize this ideal world, because the act of writing is the act of destruction, as the act of conscious recollection is the act of destroying. In addition, the true poet's conceptualization of the ideal is somehow more authentic, one of true beauty.

This is because the process of imagining the ideal, as Baudelaire describes it, strains towards a sense of the infinite. The first section of *Les Paradis artificiels*, "A Taste for the Infinite," begins with a description of the sensation attained at times, such

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Schriften*, I, 432.

as after one awakens from a dream, or when one falls into recollecting times past, of “fair seasons, delightful days, and joyful minutes,” where the “moral world opens its vast perspectives, full of a new, intense brilliancy,” and the artist feels “at once more artistic, more just, and more noble” (PA 31). How can this sensation be prolonged, or even maintained, beyond these ecstatic, fleeting moments? These moments, compared to the drudge of everyday life, are “paradisal,” and they arrive without prompting. But it is the desire of man to attain these moments more often, and if one is “wise,” now having been introduced to the possibility of attaining these moments, these moments will simply compel one to submit oneself to a regimen of meditation and work in order to reach them again by means of exercising the will. This, however, is not always the case. If one is not wise, one will turn to artificial means to attain what is ultimately a “false ideal.” Baudelaire argues that it is this desire to attain wholeness, having glimpsed it on occasion and now strongly desiring to participate in it, that propels humans to indulge in drug-induced excess. After all, these drugs seem to produce these visions of paradise, even though they are ultimately dangerous, and destructive to the self.

Intoxication

Baudelaire claims that those visions that are induced artificially are less real than the visions of the ideal that sometimes descend upon humans, that they are “morbid pleasures” of a “false ideal.” This is because these visions aren't of heaven, but of the earth, revealing “nothing to the individual but the individual himself” (PA 74). He describes the experiences of various users of hashish as experiences that altered their

sense of subjectivity, inducing hallucinatory experiences. But they are “rooted in the ambient surroundings and present circumstances,” “exaggerating” that which is in one's external surroundings rather than coming from a divine source (PA 52). Furthermore, though these visions seem beautiful, they are ultimately induced by substances that are destructive to the system, and because they are artificially induced, Baudelaire writes that the person using the substance becomes fatally dependent on the substance for inducing these grand visions, and thereby becomes incapable of using her own imagination to produce them, as she might have been before.

He contrasts these artificially induced visions with the visions gained by means of “daily work and meditation; through the assiduous exercise of our will and our solid nobility of purpose,” from which can be attained “a garden of true beauty for our enjoyment” (PA 74).

As De Quincey has stated before, the vision of wholeness attained by artificial means cannot suffice. Baudelaire articulates, in a section aptly titled “Moral,” that attaining these ecstatic drug-induced dreams destroys the will of man to persist. He compares this choice “to tamper with his destiny” in deciding to not accept “life's conditions” (and to pursue artificially-induced paradises) as similar to the choice Melmoth makes in Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. In this Gothic Romance, a “wandering Jew” character named Melmoth sells his soul to the devil—gaining an extra year of life, but condemned for eternity as a result (PA 72).

To pull these various threads together: writing is “destruction,” and writing is creative of this ideal world. Those dreams that are induced by drugs—that is, those that are artificially induced by the individual in search of pleasures—are somehow less

authentic and disruptive of the self than those that are endowed upon the poet from the direct result of disciplined, meditative processes. Baudelaire claims the visions induced by drugs are not ideal because they present visions that aren't purely from divine sources (viz. Haussmann's imposed, essentially derivative, false ideal), but that come from the physical world, revealing nothing to the individual but himself. But this presents some difficulties for the mechanism of memory in the process of understanding the self in relation to one's past. Despite this interplay of words and reformation of ideas *ad infinitum*, words cannot ever tap into the true essence of things because the act of writing is a destructive and reconstructive process.

Straining towards infinity

As in De Quincey, this conceptualization of memory and understanding one's self in relation to the past is an external process that becomes almost intertextual in nature. Perhaps the ideal, which comes from a divine, external source that one can attempt at through this "straining towards infinity," is necessary in order to understand the self. But in contrast to the sense of inevitability in *Confessions* regarding the necessity of an intertextual notion of self, Baudelaire argues that this is the more authentic understanding of self; seeing one's self in relation to a divine, external source is somehow more ideal. Julia Kristeva writes that it is this straining that characterizes Baudelaire's artistic project; rather than essentially recycling at the level of the vulgar and imposing the form of the ideal on a physical reality, Baudelaire strains for some ideal, ultimately unattainable purity. It does not even matter that God may not exist; he believes that religion still would be divine without the existence of God. What is

important is the fact of the dynamic between worshipper and religion, of poet and the purity of symbol for which she strains²⁷. This dynamic recalls Baudelaire's *homme d'Ovide*, head always directed towards the heavens, a yearning for the sense of infinity that comes with contemplating the divine.

There is a sense, in De Quincey's *Confessions*, of an intertextuality on the level of the events of one's life, on the level of the relationships between communicants and communicators, of one's present self in relation to past selves. In some sense, these relationships are constructed within a hermetic system of words that others have formed, of repetition and recurrence. In contrast, Baudelaire's conception of the vision of self, of understanding memory and one's self in relation to the past, relies on the project of art as a straining towards the pure, divine vision, rather than the artifice of constructing relationships between that which is essentially disparate in order to arrive at the meaning and understanding of the self that arrives from this constructed conception of the past.

The autobiographic self is essentially constructed from the words of others; it is from the process of taking the forms of others' ideas that something can be formed. Despite this interplay of words and reformation of ideas *ad infinitum*, words cannot ever tap into the true essence of things because the act of writing is a destructive and reconstructive process. Baudelaire's distrustfulness of the autobiographic process does not rely on De Quincey's awareness and distrustfulness of the unity that can only be allayed by means of *artifice*. Reading De Quincey's conception of such artifice (on the level of constructing unities among that which is essentially disparate) in terms of the language of Baudelaire's ideal imposed on the physical world, opium consumption to

²⁷ Kristeva, 320.

attain the ideal, as criticized in “Le poème de hashisch,” becomes a parallel for the desire to attain the ideal through artificial means while remaining on the level of the self and that which reveals the individual and “nothing but the individual himself.” As Baudelaire puts it:

Man cannot escape the destiny of his moral and physical temperament. Hashish will be, indeed, for the impressions and familiar thoughts of the man, a mirror which magnifies, yet no more than a mirror. (PA 40)

Baudelaire goes on to describe the downfalls of the use of the drug itself, and the lack of control it causes, emphasizing that these dreams are “always faithful to their origin.” What distinguishes this “straining towards infinity,” however, characterized by steady, meditative, ultimately non-disruptive and more fulfilling practices, is an idealization of the function of art and its possibilities.

The nature of that which is to be strained for

Kristeva writes that this particular desire for the “Other” reflects something she describes as the “paternal function,” an inherently narcissistic structure that creates a means by which some “imaginary father” allows the self to “unfold and bespeak itself”²⁸. This fatherly figure is the purity of the symbol, which imparts to the self its identity. It is the hope, then, that the symbol would manifest in the self this way. It is only the hope of art to create artifice, to create these floating symbols that are frozen, so to speak—reaching into Walter Benjamin's concept of the *mimesis of death*—and to thereby construct the self based on these symbols. Kristeva writes that Baudelaire always conceived of himself in such terms, and that in *Les Paradis artificiels*, this desire to

28 Kristeva, 321.

move towards the infinite manifests in the poet's desire to construct a self comprised of the symbolic. The possibility of the imaginary is infinite, and it is towards the creative ability of the divine that the poet ultimately strains.

Baudelaire envisions himself as God-like, but as never quite reaching this state of being; it is this being on the cusp of the infinite, this straining, that characterizes his literary project. Deploring the tendency to seek the ideal by means of artificial pleasures—a project that recalls the attempt to impose a unity to an individual's past by means of artifice—Baudelaire instead presents the straining towards the realm of the symbolic, the infinite, and ultimately the divine in order to impart meaning to the identity of the self. Memory in the former case is a process characterized by destruction and reconstruction, providing contingent constructions for conceiving the self that reveal nothing to the individual but himself. The latter “straining towards infinity” is more sustainable and less disruptive to the machinations of the individual on a practical level, while posing the possibility of attaining meaning outside of the magnification of the self. The possibility of this nourishing symbol figuration (to be strained toward) requires an examination of the self in relation to this symbol.

Floating Symbols and the Creation of Allegory

Examining the role of the symbol in Baudelaire, it would be impossible to ignore the phenomenon of Haussmannization in the background, and the changes Paris underwent while Baudelaire completed his major works. At the time, Haussmannization was—and, to an extent, is to this day— widely criticized for its political motives and its seemingly arbitrary and radical destruction of “Old Paris.” Baron Georges Haussmann, under the emperor Napoléon III (Louis Napoléon), oversaw a plan that meant to prepare the city for the onslaught of modernity. But his vision was criticized for seeking to suppress insurrectionary movements in the center of the city and for imposing Napoleon III's illusions of empire, while destroying that which was authentic about the city. Baudelaire famously laments in “Le Cygne,” a poem from *Tableaux parisiens* in which the changes wrought by Haussmannization figure centrally, “Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas ! que le coeur d'un mortel).”

But, of course, this romanticized view of Paris pre-Haussmannization cast a nostalgic haze over the reality of its choked, choleric streets that lacked a modern sewage plan, and the narrow, muddy streets in which it was difficult for sunlight to reach most, if any, of the windows. Shelley Rice quotes M. Lachaise in writing that “Because of the crowding of the buildings, and their excessive height...the sun can penetrate only a short while in some streets...and so on the first floor one is always in the dark, even though the sun is already high on the horizon”²⁹. In these unsanitary, tenebrous streets, cholera was easily spread; cholera epidemics killed 18,300 in 1832, including the prime minister, and 19,000 during 1848-1849. This, in addition to the

²⁹ Rice, 9.

difficulties in traffic due to the lack of a centralized highway plan and a route linking the eastern and western portions of the city, as well as the lack of a streamlined system connecting train stations to the center of Paris, made clear that this “Old Paris” was unsustainable³⁰.

The rise of the photographic process in the mid-nineteenth-century, coinciding with the beginnings of Haussmannization, meant that the entire process of demolition and reconstruction would be heavily documented by government-commissioned photographers³¹. These included Charles Marville, Henri Le Secq, Edouard-Denis Baldus, and Gustav Le Gray, some of whom later romanticized the medieval city of Paris that existed before the new plans; Charles Marville, in particular, has in recent years become known for his government-commissioned photography documenting the destruction of Old Paris and its characteristically narrow streets. It is useful to consider the memory function of photography at this moment. Namely, the act of photography becomes an important metaphor for understanding the manifestation of the anxiety of losing. This is, after all, a central impulse of photography, one that drives the photographer to take the photograph. As Walter Benjamin writes, “Anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image,” a statement that is reflected in the nostalgic impulse evoked by the rapid changes heralding what Baudelaire would later describe as the “modernity” encroaching upon the latter half of the nineteenth century³². The physical manifestation of this impulse to document what is at risk of disappearing irrevocably is the act of photography.

30 Carmona, 147.

31 Haussmannization began in 1853. Daguerre's photographic process was introduced to the public in 1839.

32 Benjamin, 87.

Metaphorically, the nostalgic impulse embodied in the desire to photograph parallels the process of Haussmannization. In choosing the monuments to save, the plan isolated what would become “floating symbols” in the cityscape, symbols that lost the context from which they had come. Benjamin writes of the three major monuments that were chosen to be saved from the Old Paris: the Sainte-Chapelle, the Vendôme column, and the Arc de Triomphe³³. He describes them as symbolic of antiquity and a sense of grandeur to be held onto, as reflective of a desire for historicity that also was seen (though in a different context) in the new Haussmann buildings constructed with what Rice calls a “temporal universality” in mind³⁴. But smaller monuments, such as a church that had a particular significance to the community surrounding it, would now be decontextualized from past attachments. Now that the buildings formerly surrounding it were demolished, and a new cityscape was constructed around it, it is rendered decontextualized, floating in the uncertain territories of shifting physical realities and the memory connected to it in the background. As is the case with the photograph, which does not fully partake in either the future or the past, but of the fleeting, dehistoricized instant that is captured, these buildings exist as floating symbols that are neither fully part of the past nor of the future, taken, as they are, from a continuity formerly rooted in physical objects.

In the attempt to catch a sense of grounding historicity in the capturing of fleeting instants, what is gained instead is what Jameson, in describing the position of the symbol, calls a “temporal limitation” that “expresses the historical impossibility in the modern world for genuine reconciliation to endure in time, for it to be anything

33 Benjamin, 84.

34 Rice, 57.

more than a lyrical, accidental present”³⁵. These moments of symbolic creation are frozen instants that hold the suggestion of grand histories beneath the surface, while simultaneously threatening a sinking nothingness. This is a tendency in Baudelaire's poetry, with his elusive figures that seem to represent an ahistoricized, decontextualized sense of eternity, while threatening a kind of emptiness at the core. In “À une passante,” the woman—“une femme passa”—disappears as quickly as she, “Fugitive beauté,” appears on scene. The fascination of the moment, the “rebirth” that she seems to cause, is subsumed to the pace of urban life and the threat of disappearance at every turn of something that momentarily appears and fascinates. But the “moi” of the poem is complicit with such urban behavior, for he ignores the direction of where the figure flees, and she, too, will never know where he has gone.

In light of De Quincey's project, the act of symbol creation figures significantly in the construction of his autobiographic project. Gesturing towards symbolic elements in the recurrence of spectres of memory and dreams is a manner by which to confront that which might be too painful to confront without a distance that Martin Danahay calls “anesthetizing”³⁶. De Quincey writes that it would be impossible to fully confront the experiences of his past—painful and humiliating as they are—without conscious emotional and temporal distancing. Much of this distancing figures in the artifice involved in constructing the text. He states that he must assume the perspective of multiple decades—perhaps twenty, thirty, or fifty years—in order to reflect upon his experiences. As discussed earlier, he also consciously figures his life story into a narrative form that neatly fits into the form of sections and chapters, referring constantly

35 Jameson, 72.

36 Danahay, 87.

to new turns in his life in the metaphoric language of writing, and literally referring to a new stage in his life as “one chapter [that] had finished” (C 57). Writing, for him, provides a “spiritualizing haze” drawing upon “the great catholic principle of *Idem in Alio*. The symbol restores the theme...gives back but changes; restores but idealizes” (C 51). For De Quincey, these symbols cast a kind of filtering haze on his life experiences. It is a refraction that allows for the construction of a unity of self, which parallels the function of the autobiographic text, which unites that which is disparate in the life of the writer. The creation of these symbolic elements—of Ann, of his ghostly double in the Spectre of Brocken, of the mysterious Malay—allow for him to idealize his past, and to reformulate his experiences, ultimately resulting in a cohesive, palatable form suitable for public consumption.

A central tension in *Les paradis artificiels* is the almost religious stricture that Baudelaire seems to hold against drug consumption, held in conjunction with the rapturous, almost idealistic descriptions of drug-induced visions, descriptions in which he seems to almost indulge. Josh Wilner quotes Maurice Sallet in suggesting that Baudelaire is allowed to present his “poetic debt to drugs” as a result of the moralizing he presents, and the framing of these rapturous discourses in explicitly textual formats, a move that harkens back to De Quincey's “anesthetizing” of his past by means of symbolic creation in order to present it in a mode suitable for public consumption³⁷.

These descriptions of intoxication—formerly always explicitly referred to as secondhand accounts to which he has no direct relation—reach a hazy peak in the “Le théâtre de séraphin” section of “Le poème du haschisch,” in which Baudelaire speaks directly, in the second-person, to the reader in offering him the pleasures of hashish, and

³⁷ Wilner, 98.

narrates the effects of intoxication by putting the reader in the place of the addict, speaking to him in the present tense:

At times you will find that your conscious nature has disappeared and that objectivity, which is the attribute of pantheistic poets, follows a course of abnormal development...You endow the tree with your passions and desires; its capriciously swaying limbs become your own, so that soon you yourself are that tree (PA 51).

He continues to describe various sensations of becoming the experience that the self is experiencing, of becoming a bird, of becoming that which is smoked by a pipe. The mind is overpowered, and he uses the imagery of fog, haze, and evaporation to describe the languorous effects of the drug on disrupting any connection between subjectivity and objectivity in perspective. What is unsettling about this section of the poem is the change in perspective to a distinct second-person narration, placing in parallel the collapsing in distance between the reader and the autobiographic text and the collapsing in distance between the writer and the experiences of the writer. Baudelaire suggests with this shift in perspective that the dangers in intoxication lie in the fact that it does not provide distance between the self and the experiences of the self, a distance that seems necessary for the construction of the text. Rather, the self and the experience of an event become one in a strange, pantheistic confluence, and therein lie the dangers of intoxication.

Lyu writes that Baudelaire's surrender to poetry, and to the divine ability to symbolize that he assumes in his role as poet, reflects his triumph over being consumed and thereby losing the self to intoxication³⁸. Rather, he has surrendered to “freedom,” as

³⁸ Lyu, 25.

opposed to assuming the delusion that he is free and in Heaven, which recalls the criticism Baudelaire makes of the false, illusory nature of the visions gained by means of intoxication, an intoxication that forces the drug user to grow reliant on the substance for visions, disrupting his own ability to attain them by the more pure means of artistic discipline. Poetic freedom implicates a perspective that is not centered entirely on the self, a space in which the lines between success and failure, and pleasure and pain, are demarcated rather than anesthetized. This is a liberating space in which the self takes on responsibility and escapes the possibility of sluggish languor associated with the pleasures of drug consumption. The distance between the self and the experiences of the self seem consequently a prerequisite for true artistic creation marked by new, innovative forms that transcend this languor—and, of course, for the autobiographic text to be even created.

“Tout devient allégorie”

Baudelaire, as well as Benjamin, complicates the relationship between the act of symbolizing and the act of photography as described earlier. They are both obsessed with the impulse to create symbols in light of a rapidly changing world that threatens loss at every turn³⁹.

Baudelaire's vision of modernity, as T.J. Clark writes in *The Absolute Bourgeois*⁴⁰ is so saturated with the apparition of allegorical figures and the hinting at some fantastical vision behind them because of the nature of Paris in its constantly

39 Both Benjamin and Jameson, in his commentary on Benjamin's allegory, distinguish between allegory and symbol. For the purpose of this essay, I will define allegory as complicit with symbolic creation, without drawing terribly much distinction between them as distinct acts with different aims.

40 Clark, 163.

shifting appearance to the self in terms of its inner and outer realities. The only manner by which some vision of it can be grasped—by which some form of a relationship may be established between the self experiencing the city and the shifting nature of the city—is by means of allegory and fantastical figuration. This can often turn into caricature. Indeed, Baudelaire often leans partial to the viewpoints, the “refractory imaginings of the outcast or the melancholic,” as in, for instance, “Les Sept Vieillards” et “Les Aveugles,” as they provide a manner by which the poet may engage with the features of the city. It is these symbolic elements that guide his urban experience of the shifting realities of modernity.

But while this type of allegorical engagement with the city as a city-dweller seems for Baudelaire attendant to the characteristics of modernity as a given, Wilner's use of “anesthetizing” to describe De Quincey's particular engagement with the relationship between symbol and the experiences he describes in the context of an autobiographic text seems complicit with the imaginings of the intoxicated self. After all, the intoxicated self is one who is given an “anesthetized” vision of life; Baudelaire writes disdainfully on the addict who cannot accept “life's conditions,” who follows in the path of that condemned Melmoth, who sold his soul in a satanic pact, subverting the conditions of the fate given to him (PA 72). To what extent does De Quincey provide such an essentially false, illusory vision of his life in his autobiographic text, unable to fully confront the painful reality of his experiences, and allowing them to be consumed by the haze provided by symbolic creation (and thereby not accepting the conditions of his fate)? And how does this contrast with Baudelaire's dependence on the crystallized instant of the symbol, with his dependency on allegory for engaging with the landscape

of the city?

Moral posturing

Certainly, both writers put on the mantle of moral scrutiny in their relationships with intoxication. The purpose of Baudelaire's moral scrutiny is to exalt the position of the writer and that which he writes, and the arduous process he must go through in order to attain the visions that drug users seem to believe they can easily get through intoxication, while avoiding the seemingly apparent fact of the influence of intoxication on his own writing. De Quincey's is that of a personal experience meant to be shared as a "precautionary tale," and thereby frames it in terms of public consumption. As he writes in the beginning to *Confessions*, he is driven by some moral purpose; so driven is he that he will penetrate this moral veneer of decency in order to recount his personal experience with addiction. In a sense, this moral disclaimer allows him the freedom to present his experiences at will, for they are underpinned by a clearly written out moral purpose, and De Quincey has invoked the precedents of other well-regarded confessions in the background, besides.

Though Baudelaire explicitly claims separation from the world of drugged intoxication, there have been many critics who cannot seem to fully detach his writing from the influence of drugs, though Baudelaire explicitly attempts to detach his writing from such experiences by writing outright that the experiences he describes are secondhand accounts that he regards with distance and objectivity. Lyu writes in "High Poetics" that it is this desire to separate the poetic experience from that of hashish that leads Baudelaire to write such disdainful criticism of hashish consumption and its

attendant visions at the end of “Le poème du haschisch,” and, in contrast, such high praise of poets, who are figured on Mt. Olympus with the Muses, and as having cultivated a garden of true virtues by means of their arduous labor⁴¹.

As a matter of asserting his state of not being consumed by their power, he desires to separate his own writing from the influence of these drugs, though it is covertly inherently influenced by their power. Baudelaire consistently uses words that establish drugs as having an invasive quality to them. In a representative sentence, he writes that in the state of hashish intoxication, “[t]he mind is penetrated, invaded, and overpowered by their despotic character” (PA 50-51). The drug threatens the dissolution of the self, of the real possibility of losing one's connection to the self under the influence of intoxication. Wilner writes that Baudelaire is obsessed with the idea of incorporation—he often figures eating, drinking, and being intoxicated in his writing—but Baudelaire is also concerned with the consumption involved in consuming that which consumes the self, reflecting an anxiety of being burned as a result of “the incorporation of the other.” The image of the drug can easily be identified with these “satanic embodiments,” being, as they are, artificial inducements to pleasure. Wilner recalls, in relation to these artificial pleasures, Baudelaire's critical essay on Theodore de Banville in which he describes the demoniacal tendency as being fed by “artificial means,” like geese being fattened in preparation for being consumed. It is this strange tension of being consumed after consuming that parallels the process of drug consumption⁴². Besides, in *Les paradis artificiels*, Baudelaire consistently identifies

41 Lyu: Sept 1994.

42 Wilner, 103. Wilner also describes this idea of “le bonheur vomitif” associated particularly with hashish, which I think would be interesting to examine in light of gaining freedom/losing volition as a result of consuming these substances. That is, this idea of consuming but not attaining nourishment.

drugs with that which is satanic/demoniac.

But simultaneously, the conscious separation of the self that Baudelaire presents in *Les paradis artificiels* and the intoxication of drugs to which addicts are vulnerable, a separation that is effected by means of this condemning of intoxication, allows Baudelaire the freedom to write as he does, to indulge in writing that is identifiably intoxicated prose. This particularly drug-influenced prose might be held in parallel to De Quincey's "impassioned prose," or writing that attempts "to clothe in words the visionary scenes derived from the world of dreams," as De Quincey writes in the general preface to a collected edition of his writings in 1853.

Returning to allegory

Reconciling these threads, the act of creating a symbol in De Quincey's *Confessions* is the conscious act of filtering the experiences of his life to create one that is appropriate for public consumption, one that grants him the ability to confront his experiences, albeit through a filter. In understanding the construction of the autobiographic self, the creation of symbol is useful for casting an anesthetic haze of unity. In addition, the unity constructed by intoxication accounts for the increase of shocks attendant to modern life; it allows for what Clej calls "simulacral participation" on the part of the spectator, who is subject to this sudden increase in shocks, and becomes numb to their effects, allowing for De Quincey the sense of unity among social classes that apparently allowed him to frequent the establishments of the lower classes⁴³. It also allows for, suggestively, the creation of distance between the self and the experiences of the past, a distance that inherently allows for the nostalgic impulse. Clej

43 Clej, 168.

quotes Hazlitt in writing that “it is the interval that separates us from it that excites... [i]nto that great gap in our being come thronging soft desires and infinite regrets.⁴⁴” As in Haussmann's Paris, the landscape of the past disappears under an opiate haze constructed of symbols that are infinitely suggestive but ultimately decontextualized and perhaps not the truest recollection of what once was.

The illusive⁴⁵ sense of continuity gained under intoxication reflects the precarious state of the symbol in the underlying logic of Baudelaire's Paris. In Benjamin's allegorical meditation according to Jameson, the symbol is desired as a way of possessing that which to him he is rendered numb as a result of the assault of everyday urban living, and so he holds onto the “concrete, physical” image of the symbol⁴⁶. But this symbol is constantly at risk of disappearance, illusory fulfillment as it is. Despite this threat, its necessity is found in distinguishing the self from that which it experiences, a necessary distance in the creation of the autobiographic text. It seems, then, that Baudelaire and De Quincey are complicit in acknowledging the space required between the symbol and that which it provides “nourishment,” so to speak.

44 Hazlitt, vol. 6, 257.

45 /elusive, and even /allusive

46 Jameson, 76.

Conclusions

The overall aim of this project has been to understand the fractured conception of self as constructed in the autobiographic text. In the first chapter, I demonstrate that the relationship between literary self and the writer is articulated in the distances created between the self and the past self in the construction of an autobiography. This is a mechanism repeated in the artifice generated such that the reader is seduced into interpreting the artifice of self that is created by the writer for its sake to attain wholeness. The reader becomes complicit in interpreting the fractured self presented by the writer, and consequently maintains a pseudo-relationship with the literary self constructed for the autobiographic text. Purportedly, wholeness can be attained by autobiography, and reconstructing one's life in relation to past events, as the mechanism of memory seems to perform—it seems to be able to solve the problem of the difference between the past self and the present—, but this idea is put in tension as a result of these articulated distances.

After all, these articulated distances reflect on the idea that memory is simply a tool for constructing what the past is. Because it is a construction, the past is ineluctably contingent. Baudelaire presents a vision of the addict's world as an unideal world characterized by false illusions of grandeur. The unity purportedly gained by the addict is not revelatory, but rather magnifies the self, and represents the unseemly desire to not accept the conditions of life. The posture he praises is that of the poet who works arduously in order to attain divine visions, while setting his sights on the sky above, straining towards infinity, and hoping that this diligent labor will allow him a place on Mt. Olympus with the very Muses who inspired the greatest of poets. This view of the

drug user contrasts significantly with that of De Quincey, where there is a sense of wanting to attain wholeness by means of unifying the events on the level of the self.

This easy comparison, however, is complicated by the relationships each text has with the construction of the symbol. Both writers seem interested in uncanny symbols that seem to be taken from the outskirts of society. In De Quincey's episodes, the mysterious figures of the spectre of Brocken, of Ann, of the Malay, recur constantly as a matter of repetition in order to attain a semblance of meaning. In Baudelaire's poetry, there is a tendency towards the grotesque and the melancholic. Examples include "Les Aveugles," "L'étranger," and "Les Sept Vieillards," but imagery of that which is somewhat out of place permeates his poetry, and especially the *Tableaux parisiens* section of *Les fleurs du mal*. An example is the swan pathetically flapping his wings on dry ground, unable to accept the new surroundings, while remembering his former "beau lac natal." Baudelaire's vision of modernity is saturated with such allegorical meditation; the quotidian is obsessed with that which was, and that which will change. Unable to keep up with the pace of change, both external and internal, within the urban landscape, one attempts to cling onto these suggestive symbols as a manner by which to engage with the city. But they threaten disappearance at every turn, of a sinking nothingness as soon as they appear.

The symbol, in De Quincey's work, serves to "anesthetize" the experiences of his life so that he may confront them in the form of an autobiographic text. In Baudelaire, the symbol presents a vision of something that is clung onto in order to provide meaning; the allegorical makes possible the autobiographic text; distance is necessary in order to engage with the experience at hand, else one risks the

disappearance of self within the experience, a key danger of intoxication. Both writers, as a result, understand the necessity of symbolic distance between that which is experienced, and who experiences it, while approaching the effects of the symbol in inherently different manners, complicated by Baudelaire's concerns with the purity in straining towards the infinite, in assuming the posture of the supplicant to the worshipped.

Returning to the palimpsest, the introductory image relating the two works, the figuration of this curiosity in an understanding of the processes of memory and the relationship an urban dweller might have with a city neatly captures the fear of imminent disappearance and the lingering, suggestive historicity at the background of these allegorical appearances. As with the effacement of an old document beneath the writings of a new one, the processes of memory destroy, replace, and renew. But the figuration of the perfect palimpsest—that is, one that perfectly retains all the remains of the previous manuscript—is imperfect in capturing the nostalgia of replacement and reconstruction attendant to the processes of destruction and recreation. Once a new image is added onto a new one, the result of the superimposition of a new one is such that the experience of the old one is cast under the haze of nostalgia. In the figuration of the past, in light of the processes of consciousness and writing, the authenticity of experience cannot be recaptured except, seemingly, in the machinations of the dream.

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